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United States and India: The Reality and the Hope

Partha S. Ghosh
Ford Visiting Scholar, Program in Arms Control, Disarmament, and International Security
Indian Council of Social Science Research
New Delhi, India

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United States and India The Reality and the Hope

by Partha S Ghosh

The Myth of the Democratic Ideal

Scholars in both the United States and India have a tendency to view the U S –India relationship as a saga of missed opportunity Recently when Harold Gould and Sumit Ganguly edited a volume on the subject they wrote in their introductory remarks that there were high expectations" that there would be natural affinity between the world s largest, and Asia s first, fully democratic state " that is India and the world s most celebrated democracy " that is the United States No wonder they called their volume *The Hope and the Reality* [1]

I have my misgivings about this premise The institution of democracy actually never helped the United States and India to gloss over their differences which were structured in their conflicting approaches to the Cold War and their divergent readings of history It is only now when the Cold War is over that there is some hope there will be a growing convergence of interests On this assumption I have called the relationship the Reality and the Hope instead of the hope and the reality "

In academic circles it is common these days to argue that democracies do not go to war with each other This is probably true but democracies have often shown scant regard for democratic movements elsewhere After all it was a democratic Britain that had the world s largest empire Moreover in the matter of conflicting interests democracies are no different than other state types The U S –India relationship provides one of the best examples [2]

The problem between the United States and India was rooted in the Cold War Not only had the independence of India (August 1947) coincided with the toughening of U S posture in the Cold War (George Kennan s article on containment" was published just a month earlier) [3] the previous U S record in respect to India s freedom struggle was not particularly strong Neither in the Quit India movement of 1942 nor in the Bengal famine of 1943 did the United States do anything visibly friendly that the Indians would have remembered fondly Paramount in U S calculations was the on going war in which it was definitely more important to coordinate its strategy with that of Great Britain than to unnecessarily meddle in India s affairs at the risk of pricking British sensitivities Sir Winston Churchill had a clear world view in which the Anglo–Saxons had a definite paternalistic role to perform President Franklin Roosevelt, both on account of his personal rapport with Churchill as well as U S national interests in defeating the Axis powers had no reason to question the British wisdom [4]

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1 Harold A Gould and Sumit Ganguly *The Hope and the Reality U.S –Indian Relations from Roosevelt to Reagan* (Boulder Colo. Westview Press 1992) p 1 Gould however perceptively remarked "American diplomacy—Eurocentric to fault, ignorant of South Asian history and culture unattuned to the power of emerging Asian nationalism inhibited in any event from exercising much imagination by domestic political hysteria—had created the very potentiality for political instability economic retardation, hostility to the West, and consequent possible Soviet penetration of the region that it had ostensibly hoped to deter " See his Chapter on "U S –Indian Relations The Early Phase " p. 39

2 In his 1973 foreign policy report to the Congress President Richard Nixon said that it was "sentimentality to assume that just because India and the U S were democracies their foreign policies would be identical. See Shivaji Ganguly *U.S Policy Toward South Asia* (Boulder Colo Westview Press 1990) pp. 24 51

3 George F Kennan was on the Policy Planning Staff of the State Department. He published his anonymous article "The Sources of Soviet Conduct in *Foreign Affairs* (New York) where he propounded the theory of containment. This theory however was contested by Walter Lippmann who suggested a more aggressive U.S approach to prevent Soviet expansion. See his *The Cold War A Study in U.S Foreign Policy* (New York. Harper and Brothers 1947)

4 See two most authoritative works on the subject. M. S Venkataramani and B K. Shrivastava, *Quit India The American Response to the 1942 Struggle* (New Delhi Vikas 1979) and M S Venkataramani, *Bengal Famine of 1943 The American Response* (New Delhi Vikas 1973) About the famine Venkataramani writes. "As I see it, a substantial burden of responsibility for the calamity in Bengal should rest on Winston Churchill. President Roosevelt and his principal associates were aware of the nature and magnitude of the famine but failed to initiate any concrete action because of their preoccupation with the war effort and their reluctance to offend Churchill on matters relating to India. The Americans were in effect, virtually silent onlookers of Churchill s actions if not his accessories I have used the expression Churchillism a few times in my work. While Churchill is regarded as a great champion of liberty in the Western world Churchillism

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Logically there was nothing abnormal about the way the United States behaved But then the same was true of India s doubts about the future of Indo–U S relations East–West relations were becoming more complicated and India was not sure which way to tilt The policy of non alignment considered by India to be a strategy to ensure equi proximity to both power blocs was grossly misunderstood in Washington as anti American [5]

It is not necessary to go into the details of this perceptional hiatus between the two powers for the subject is already well documented [6] What may however be emphasized here is that despite their common democratic ideals here were two civilizations proud of themselves for different reasons that were called upon to strike a mutually advantageous deal for which neither was willing to accommodate the other beyond a bare minimum I have a hunch that had Henry Kissinger chosen to do his research on this phase of U S –India relations he would have characterized it as the dialogue of the deaf an expression he later used to underline the deep seated perceptional gap between Richard Nixon s global approach and Indira Gandhi s regional approach to the Bangladesh crisis [7] Raymond Cohen s recent study *Negotiating Across Cultures* provides additional evidence of the communication gap between the two nations [8]

The Problem of Asymmetry

The basic problem between the United States and India is that it is a relationship of unequals Tension between the United States and India, based on this inequality has surfaced over and over again for the last forty years since the 1954 strategic relationship between the United States and Pakistan Neither militarily nor economically is India a match for the United States America s status as a global power is after the end of the Cold War undisputed while India s status as a mere regional power is disputed by Pakistan India views its future in two stages first that it should become an undisputed regional power and second develop clearly defined spheres of influence so as to put it on a par with China In India s reckoning it was Washington s Cold War strategy that blocked these ambitions However in U S reckoning India was strategically unrealistic Just as the United States was frantically looking for allies in the region to challenge the growing power of communism India looked elsewhere Indeed by staying out of the U S organized bloc and by pleading for Communist China s entry into the United Nations it boosted the morale of America s adversaries

It may be argued that India still probably could have attracted Washington s attention if not respect had it single mindedly pursued its goals Recall Richard Nixon s rationale to open up to China in 1972 a nation of 800 million people with nuclear weapons could no longer be ignored India took the first step to go nuclear in 1974 but did not have the requisite nerve to carry on the process in the face of international opposition Of course the United States is not going to listen to a nation of 800 million people if it possesses neither nuclear teeth nor economic muscle Now under growing pressure from the United States to sign the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) some Indians must now regret having missed the opportunity of going nuclear in 1974

Economically India matters little to the United States The opposite is not true About 15 percent of India s export trade depends upon the United States but its share of U S external trade is not more than 0 5 percent. In 1992 according to a report issued by the U S Trade Representative India ranked thirty sixth in the U S export market accounting for a mere $1 9 billion worth of exports In the same year India exported $3 8 billion worth

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was a monstrous abomination as far as the nations under British colonial rule were concerned By Churchillism I mean a philosophy of imperialist arrogance buttressed by a racist belief in the white man s burden expressed in Machiavellian repressive and callous actions to preserve and promote imperial interests regardless of the agonies they inflicted on the subject peoples For decades Churchill harbored and propagated his malady But during the years of the Second World War when he was the undisputed leader of Britain Churchillism came into its own with consequences that hardly add luster to the history of the country that he loved passionately pp viii–ix

5 There were domestic compulsions also for India to follow the policy of non alignment. On this point, see Partha S Ghosh Domestic Sources of India s Policy of Non Alignment *India Quarterly* (New Delhi) 36 (3–4) (1978) 348–62

6 Robert Jervis *Perception and Misperception in International Relations* (Princeton Princeton University Press 1976) Also see Partha S Ghosh *Sino–Soviet Relations U S Perceptions and Policy Responses* (New Delhi Uppal 1991) the introductory chapter

7 Henry A Kissinger *The White House Years* (Boston Little Brown 1979) pp 878–82.

8 Raymond Cohen *Negotiating Across Cultures Communication Obstacles in International Diplomacy* (Washington D C U S Institute of Peace Press 1991)

of goods to the United States [9] As a result the United States figures prominently in Indian politics while India does not figure at all in U S politics [10] Intermestic issues have little to do in the formulation of Washington s South Asia policy [11]

As a result of these military and economic variables India has remained on the margins of U S global strategy It was viewed as a hypocritical nation that believed in sermonizing to others while doing precious little itself to promote its own interests India s perception of the United States remained that of an equally hypocritical nation whose championing of democracy was a ploy to register subservience through other means

The Perceptual Gap

Behind these differing perceptions of economic and strategic interests U S –India relations have been shaped by a deeper undercurrent of conflicting perceptions of history The United States as a nation lives in the present, but in India the philosophical tradition the past or the future are more relevant. Witness the two diametrically opposed political debates now raging in India. one over building a temple to a God the other over unleashing the Indian economic tiger so as to allow it to prowl in the woods of international trade Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had a better vision of the future than Harry Truman but the future had little meaning for Truman He had to deal with the situation then not ten years later As a two hundred year old nation imbued with the belief that there is nothing that man cannot do and do quickly Americans fail to understand the lethargy and procrastination of Indians to solve their own problems [12] I can well appreciate the frustration of Stephen Cohen to push his idea for a South Asian Regional Initiative (SARI) among his Indian counterparts No doubt the idea deserves serious consideration but South Asia needs more thawing—which Cohen himself grudgingly recognizes [13]

The Future No Euphoria

What is the future of U S –India relations? Is the situation we have discussed showing any sign of change? Although there are straws in the wind pointing to some mutual accommodations by and large there has not been any significant change so far In the United States at the popular level India is still on the periphery notwithstanding the fact that it has absorbed about a million professionally and economically successful Indians Although there are some efforts on behalf of the Indian community to partake in the American political process so as to make its presence felt [14] generally speaking it is an insular group that spends more time debating developments back home in India than participating in matters that concern Americans Moreover fragmented along political lines drawn in India it can hardly provide a coherent Indian picture Even its potential contribution to India s economic progress on the patriotic plane is overestimated [15]

Americans in general are indifferent toward India. It is only in response to such obscurantist developments as the demolition of the Babri mosque the outdated social institution of caste system the danger of nuclear proliferation or the alleged human rights violations in Kashmir and elsewhere that India finds occasional mention in U S print and electronic media Even in the universities India related debates and discussions hardly attract an American audience Indian study departments are gasping for funds even to maintain their

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9 *India Abroad* (New York) 9 April 1993 p 26

10 See Partha S Ghosh Neither Abel nor Cain A Framework of Indo–U S Relations in Robert M Crunden et al eds *New Perspectives on America and South Asia* (New Delhi Chanakya 1984) pp 77–100

11 Intermestic issues means issues that are simultaneously profoundly and inseparably both domestic and international See Bayless Manning "The Congress the Executive and Intermestic Affairs Three Proposals *Foreign Affairs* 55 (2) (January 1977) 309

12. Nehru s greatest problem was that he tried to chisel diplomacy with the tools of a scholar Take for example his U S visit in October 1949 It was a disaster because he said things that the Americans did not want to hear He was certainly prophetic about several things notably the inevitable rift between China and the Soviet Union but it was not the time (China had just fallen to communism and the Soviets had exploded their atomic bomb) to expect patient hearing from Americans with an open mind on the subject Nehru s visit instead of improving Indo–U S ties damaged them Truman was simply unimpressed by the Indian Prime Minister while Secretary of State Dean Acheson had to confess that he was one of the most difficult men with whom I have ever had to deal Dean Acheson *Present at the Creation My Years in the State Department* (New York W W Norton 1969) pp 334–36

13 Stephen P Cohen A Fresh U S Policy for South Asia and India s Part in Influencing It *India Abroad* 2 April 1993 pp 1–2 14

14 See Partha S Ghosh Beyond the American Melting Pot *India International Centre Quarterly* (New Delhi) 17 (1) (Spring 1990) 23–32.

15 On this point, see Swaminathan S Anklesaria Aiyar Alternative to the IMF *Sunday Times of India* (New Delhi) 7 June 1992

existing programs The fact that young Americans are not studying India is evident from the fact that most academic writings or attendance at seminars and conferences are by relatively senior scholars who have been in the field for decades [16] No wonder that in the recent presidential debate South Asia did not figure at all Whenever some references were made they were in the context of nuclear proliferation [17]

This indifference to South Asia is not typical of the United States in relating itself to other regions of Asia Both for strategic and economic reasons the rest of Asia is a matter of keen interest. In November 1992 when the Washington based Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) prepared its ninety three page Agenda 93"—divided into fifty-one chapters—there was not a single chapter devoted to South Asia Notably there were as many as ten chapters dealing with East and Southeast Asia on one hand and West and Central Asia on the other [18]

Recently a former U S diplomat surveyed America s role in Asia in 1992 His obsession was so much with U S economic interests in eastern Asia that he forgot to remember that Asia also existed westward and southward beyond China To quote the diplomat 'The now famous slogan on the wall of the Clinton campaign headquarters in Little Rock reads Its the economy stupid As the Clinton administration begins one assumes there was an unwritten second line to that slogan And the economy is global Perhaps there should be also be a third line And you better pay special attention to Asia [19] I think that the diplomat should have added a fourth line as well And Asia means China eastward

Against this background there are reasons to fear that U S –India dialogue once again might end up as the dialogue of the deaf The concerns that Americans show on issues such as nuclear and missile proliferation or human rights are matters of marginal importance insofar as Indian politics goes Moreover as discussed above they are restrictive of Indian ambitions and pride which no party worth its salt can accept without running grave political risks So far there has been no evidence that any of the political parties is preparing it supporters to swallow the bitter pill of NPT [20] Rather the Hindu chauvinistic Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which is gaining in strength openly announces its policy of going nuclear if it came to power [21]

Also on the question of human rights India does not appreciate the meddling by external powers Faced with the greatest challenge to its territorial integrity since independence it views these exhortations as avoidable pinpricks Once again as a nation proud of its intellectual tradition and buttressed by more than a hundred years of Western liberal education it feels that there is enough room within the system to take care of the human rights abuses and would rather not listen to external sermons when the exponent s own record in this regard has not always been clean and uniform

Restrictions on transfer of technology is yet another potential area of conflict and it is feared that the United States might repeat the same mistake it committed in the fifties For example the Cray YMP supercomputer deal is now off because India has objected to U S conditions that it calls unacceptable The deal proposed in 1988 faced rough weather largely because U S officials imposed greater limitations on exports to countries that

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16. An average American s image of India has not changed much since the publication of Harold R Isaacs *Scratches on Our Minds American Images of China and India* (New York John Day 1958) For a recent analysis see M J Vinod Images of India in the United States Retrospect and Prospect, *Indian Journal of Political Science* (New Delhi) 50 (3) (July–September 1989) 376–88 It may however be argued that in a society as diverse as America other than Europe or Japan most of the remaining regions of the globe have only segmental appeal, if any For example when Nelson Mandela came to the United States he created a huge stir in the media but surveys found that only blacks seemed to be paying attention An hour long television interview with Mandela by Ted Koppel gained just 9 percent of a prime time audience extremely low even by the standards of news programming See David Gergen How is America Changing? American Leadership The Challenges Back Home *Adelphi Papers* (London) 257 (Winter 1990–91) 7

17 Foreign Policy Association *Election 1992 Guide to U S Foreign Policy Issues* (New York 1992)

18 Center for Strategic and International Studies Agenda 93 CSIS Policy Action Papers (Washington D C November 1992) Non American perspectives were not any different. A conference organized in 1990 by the London based International Institute for Strategic Studies on America s Role in a Changing World ignored South Asia altogether Unimportant regions (South Asia?) were characterized as strategic slums that would be left to stew See *Adelphi Papers* 257 (Winter 1990–91) 107

19 Stephen W Bosworth (former U S Ambassador to the Philippines and Tunisia) The U S and Asia in 1992 A New Balance *Asian Survey* (Berkeley) 33 (1) (January 1993) 104

20 See Partha S Ghosh Foreign Policy Issues in the 1991 Indian General Elections *Asian Survey* forthcoming

21 See BJP leader L K Advani s interview in *India Abroad* 23 April 1993 p 6 But whether the BJP would actually change the present policy of nuclear ambiguity once it comes to power is questionable. Earlier during the Janata rule (1977–80) its leader Atal Behari Vajpayee as the Foreign Minister had deviated from his party s line in preference of continuity in the policy

have not signed the NPT in India s case those included having a person from Cray on site at all times and restricting physical access to the machine itself [22] America may yet face a situation as it has in the past of some other industrial nation supplying such technology circumventing the NPT Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and other regimes Insofar as know how is concerned the United States may have a slim technological lead now but a 1988 survey conducted by the *Los Angeles Times* and Booz Allen and Hamilton found that in advanced materials supercomputers lasers and fiber optics Japan was fast catching up with the United States [23] It should be recalled that in the initial stage of India s industrial development it was U S obstinacy not to aid India s steel industry because it was to be in the state sector that ultimately brought in the Soviets as partners in India s progress Incidentally two other nations that helped India build its steel industry were Britain and Germany neither of which was socialistic [24]

Climatic Changes Augur Well

In spite of these basic problems there are however reasons to hope for a better appreciation by each nation of each other s sensitivities and priorities Two changes that have occurred one in international politics and the other in India s domestic politics are bound to have some positive effects The end of the Cold War and the growing privatization of the Indian economy provides opportunities for the United States to work out new strategic and economic deals with India [25] But the task is challenging for the simple reason that it calls for *differing* sacrifices from each state

Each nation has a set of expectations about the other But because of the asymmetry of the relationship if American expectations are not fulfilled it would not matter much But if India s expectations are not fulfilled its very political stability could be affected The two basic elements of U S foreign policy in the post Cold War phase are one to ensure regional peace and two to promote U S economic interests That there is an essential linkage between the two elements needs no emphasis [26] India s foreign policy also has two basic elements one to ensure India s territorial integrity which is generally viewed in external terms and two to promote its economic interests by integrating itself into the global market.

With regard to the economic interests there is not much difficulty although occasional irritants like the controversy over intellectual property rights do surface [27] India could provide a large market for American trade and investment although the United States would still have to compete with others in the field such as Japan and Germany [28] Similarly Indians would have to attract American capital on a competitive basis since by just opening its market India has not done something unprecedented Moreover Eastern Europe Russia and the Central Asian republics have entered the fray as competitors for both aid and investment.[29] In this regard the

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22. *Nature* 361 (4 February 1993) 387

23 Rustam Lalkaka Is the United States Losing Technological Influence in the Developing Countries? *Annals* (Philadelphia) 500 (November 1988) 42–43 India itself is fast developing its computer industry and such restrictive practices of the United States can accelerate the progress Bangalore has already emerged as India s silicon valley See reports in *Far Eastern Economic Review* (Hong Kong) 10 December 1992 pp 45–46

24 Yet another example could be given In the early years of India s independence India was willing to buy from the United States bomber aircrafts Louis Johnson the then Secretary of Defense was favorably disposed to the idea However probably under British influence the deal was not struck. Interestingly it was Britain that subsequently sold to India its Canberra bombers See Ganguly *U S Policy toward South Asia* pp 22 50

25 Ramesh Thakur India After Nonalignment *Foreign Affairs* 71 (2) (Spring 1992) 165–82

26 This U S interest has been intellectually articulated by Edward A Kolodziej through his OWL model. The words Order (O) Welfare (W) and Legitimacy (L) correspond to the existing states system free market economy and democracy respectively See Edward A Kolodziej Coping With Regional Conflict A Global Perspective paper presented to the Conference on Coping With Regional Conflict, University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign October 9–11 1992

27 The Clinton administration s approach to the question of intellectual property rights would be known after 30 April 1993 the deadline set for identifying priority countries and the priority watchlist by the U S Trade Representative (USTR) In the mean time the office of the USTR, however has noted that the Indian courts have recently upheld trademark owner rights in infringement cases. See *India Abroad* 9 April 1993 p 26

28 The potential of the growing Indian middle class has been noted internationally See *Far Eastern Economic Review* 14 January 1993 pp 44–48 John Adam Thomson India Towards the Year 2000 *Asian Affairs* (London) 21 (2) (Old Series Vol 77) (June 1990) 162–73 Charles H Percy South Asia s Take-Off *Foreign Affairs* (Winter 1992–93) 166–74

29 For fiscal 1994 the Clinton administration has asked for a $311 million increase for aid to the former Soviet Union for a total of $704 million. See *India Abroad* 23 April 1993 p 22

rules of the game are already set and both the United States and India know how to deal with one another bilaterally

Still it may be argued that it probably would serve India better in the long run if it opts for some kind of concessionary approach in dealing with the United States in economic matters This would help the U S economy and howsoever small that help is it would be appreciated by that nation given its present mood It would also give India an opportunity to expect concessions from the United States in other matters India is aware of the fact that but for the good offices of the United States it could not have received the $4 billion in credits that enabled it to survive the acute balance of payments crisis caused by the oil price hike resulting from the Gulf crisis

Yet another argument could be that technical and commercial relations with the United States probably have some added advantage vis á vis other industrial nations Both for cultural and historical reasons the United States is still the most open society in all respects Value added items find an easier access to American markets than to others provided non economic hurdles do not come in the way There is only an international economy to which the American economy is connected as if by threads in a web [30] Although a late comer India can still sell in the American market and can attract U S investors provided its liberalization policies are sustained effectively implemented and duly advertised [31]

There are also some positive indications in the fields of security and strategy The end of the Cold War has helped the two nations to move closer to each other for the simple reason that it was only the Cold War that came in the way of their better understanding Although Pakistan was a partner in U S military strategy there were some inherent problems in that relationship Several opinion polls conducted in the seventies and eighties revealed that in the American mind India figured more prominently than Pakistan [32] A special issue of *The Annals* published in 1988 was devoted to anti Americanism around the world and mentioned India only in passing while a full chapter was allotted to Anti Americanism in Pakistan [33]

With the possibility of Russian withdrawal from the Indian Ocean and given the Indian perception of a growing Chinese naval capability India would not mind an American maritime presence in the Indian Ocean region [34] Besides the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait has also shown to New Delhi how any crisis in the supply channel of oil could play havoc with the Indian economy Earlier oil shocks of 1973–74 and 1979–80 had caused unprecedented inflation influencing the politics of the country During the Gulf crisis of 1990 when oil prices soared to almost $30 a barrel it was estimated that India s import bill for oil would go up by as much as Rs 40 billion in just one year In the 1980s the increasing trade deficits with West Asia were off set to a large extent by increasing remittances from the Gulf region But Iraq s invasion also resulted in the exodus of 275 000 Indian workers from the Gulf countries

Cooperation with the United States in the fields of defense and security however predates the Gulf War Ever since U S Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci s visit to New Delhi in April 1988 efforts have been underway to build cooperation in these fields but they remained primarily confined to technological agreements for manufacturing a light combat aircraft (LCA) After the Gulf War new vistas were opened marking an end of India s military isolationism General Claude Kickleighter chief of the U S Pacific Command paid a visit to New Delhi in April 1991 and held discussions with the Indian officials about defense cooperation between

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30 According to Mike Mansfield former U S Ambassador to Japan the governments of U S states maintain more offices in Tokyo than in Washington See Gergen How is America Changing? p 17 See also Paul Kennedy *Preparing for the Twenty First Century* (New York Random House 1993) pp 58–59

31 Sometimes the policies remain on paper only Arun Nehru a former minister of commerce writes that the government only talks of borrowing but there is a huge portion of the loan that remains unused because of bureaucratic delays The Economic Challenges Ahead *The Hindu* 26 January 1993 It is also felt that India s entrepreneurs are not showing enough enthusiasm to take up the challenge Abid Hussain the former Indian Ambassador to the U S says One economist described India as a tiger in a cage When the cage is opened the tiger would show its real strength The cage is now open but the tiger refuses to come out Instead it is asking outsiders to come into the cage *India Today* (New Delhi) 15 March 1993 p 19 In a recent interview in New Delhi William Henderson senior vice president and managing director of the Hong Kong based Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) said What India needs now is image building internationally I find that hard sell is not part of the culture here as it is in many other countries *India Abroad* 16 April 1993

32. John E Rielly America s State of Mind *Foreign Policy* Spring 1987 pp 39–56

33 *The Annuals* 497 (May 1988)

34 Dieter Braun Asian Power India A New Equation *Aussenpolitik*, 11 (1990) 178

the two countries The visit was pregnant with political implications particularly for India yet the matter was hardly debated during the Indian parliamentary elections that were held only a month later This can be interpreted as an indication of an emerging consensus among the political parties on the advisability of developing some kind of a security relationship with the United States It is noteworthy that both major Indian communist parties were silent The Pakistan factor—both in conjunction with China and as a vocal partner in the global Islamic reassertion against the background of a defunct Indo–Soviet treaty—must have been in the back of the mind of all concerned [35]

During the visit of the chairman of India s joint chiefs of staff General S F Rodrigues to the United States in September 1991 Washington came out with concrete proposals for defense cooperation Known as the Kickleighter proposals they advocated cooperation and partnership by the end of the 1990s through high level visits exchanges periodic policy reviews Indo–U S army staff talks and cooperative work in selected areas of common interest One of the highlights of these talks was the decision to set up binational army steering council headed by the vice chief of army staff on the Indian side and the commanding general of the U S Army (Pacific) on the U S side [36]

The details of these and other discussions are not known but they must have reinforced the shared strategic perception which will evolve into a mutual arrangement that benefits both equally to quote General S F Rodrigues [37] Did this so called shared strategic perception refer to the danger arising out of the growth of Islamic fundamentalism in West and Central Asia?

Fear of Islamic Reassertion

Ever since the Iranian hostage crisis and particularly after the end of the Cold War and the dismemberment of the Soviet Union the United States has been concerned by the specter of Islamic resurgence in critical Third World regions in the Middle East and Central Asia—the former for its oil reserves the latter for its potential as nuclear proliferator with portions of the former Soviet Union s nuclear arsenal India also has worries about its own Islamic enthusiasts who are demanding the secession of Kashmir from the Indian union

Given this situation there was reason to believe that the United States and India would find common ground in dealing with the threat posed by the forces of Islamic resurgence It may be recalled that it was Sir Olaf Caroe the British strategist belonging to the civil service of British India who had argued strongly in favor of the West s aligning with Pakistan so as to ensure the free flow of oil from the Persian Gulf region America s Cold War strategy in the region was partially dictated by this logic [38] But now that Pakistan has become a potential Islamic state and therefore less reliable as an ally in this context the United States has reason to tilt toward India which is not only a predominantly Hindu and secular state but also is engaged in dealing with Islamic forces in Kashmir to preserve the nation s territorial integrity Since these Islamic forces are actively assisted by Pakistan India has the added reason to impress upon the United States to declare Pakistan as a terrorist state [39]

It may however be argued that India would probably do better if it recognizes a subtle nuance while cooperating with the United States in this matter Its interests would be better served by following a two-pronged policy Within South Asia it should put the Islamic forces under constant pressure by strictly adhering to secularism so that its vast Muslim minority (about 11 percent of the population) feels secure this would blunt the edge of Islamic propaganda It must be understood that both the Hindu fundamentalist forces and the Islamic fundamentalist forces in Pakistan and Bangladesh thrive on each other s success If both succeed the ultimate

35 Ghosh Foreign Policy Issues in the 1991 Indian General Elections

36 For details see Gautam Adhikari s despatch from Washington in *Times of India* 8 September 1991

37 *Times of India* 1 December 1991 and 5 March 1992

38 On this point see Ganguly *U.S Policy Toward South Asia* pp 32–33

39 So far the United States has not declared Pakistan a terrorist state although there are reports that it is putting pressure on Islamabad to desist from assisting Kashmiri terrorists See *India Abroad* 16 and 23 April 1993 The Karachi based Pakistani news magazine *The Herald* of February 1993 carried stories about the secret mission in December 1992 of Robert Oakley the former U S Ambassador to Pakistan to impress upon the Nawaz Sharif government that the Clinton administration would take a serious view of Pakistan s covert interference in the affairs of Kashmir See pp 24–30

winner would be ideologues in Pakistan and Bangladesh who could claim victory for their theory that the Indian subcontinent consisted of two nations one Hindu and one Islamic Second it would help them project their Islamic identity instead of a South Asian identity

By not subscribing to the U S anxiety about Islamic resurgence per se India can always keep intact its links to the Middle East and Central Asian nations thereby making it difficult for Pakistan to turn its and India s relation with these states into a zero sum game As a developing country with more and more emphasis on export promotion India has a stake in good relations with the Middle East and Central Asian states An anti Islamic stance would jeopardize these ties It would therefore be desirable to subscribe to the view expressed in a recent study prepared by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace but with sufficient caution The study said that the emergence of India as a major military power—with a naval reach encompassing the Arabian Sea and much of the Indian Ocean and potentially the Gulf—underlines the importance of maintaining and enhancing a friendly relationship with the Indian armed forces *The growth of extremist forms of Islamic fundamentalism in areas adjacent to India especially Southwest Asia and Central Asia could pose common security concerns for New Delhi and Washington* A cooperative or neutral Indian posture could be a critical factor for the United States in the event of American involvement in future conflicts in Southwest Asia and the Gulf [40] Perhaps a neutral Indian stance would be more appropriate in select conflicts

Kashmir and Proliferation The Connection

The critical challenge however is to coordinate U S global interests with those of India s regional concerns Here the crux of the matter hinges on the nuclear question insofar as the United States is concerned and on the Kashmir question insofar as India is concerned If the United States wishes to reconcile both these goals it will have to move very carefully so as not to appear imperious During his presidential campaign Bill Clinton had promised to clamp down on countries and companies that sell proscribed technologies punish violators and work urgently with all countries for tough enforceable nonproliferation agreements His administration has now asked for a $68 million increase over 1993s $129 million for nonproliferation and arms control Releasing the President s budget proposals for fiscal 1994 the Department of State said One of the main security problems of the post Cold War era is the risk of proliferation of deadly weapons This administration gives a high priority to preventing proliferation [41] It is expected that the policy does not involve more arm twisting of India than it can politically withstand The approach should be the on going quiet bilateral diplomacy that seems to have the endorsement of America s South Asia experts [42] It is hoped that this policy will bear fruit in the long run Once India s confidence is built up it would be relatively easy to extract concessions because the Indian leaders would then find domestic political opinion more conducive to accepting changes

This rather slow and steady strategy may not be difficult for the United States to follow As previously noted India matters little to the United States and consequently there is little likelihood of its getting drawn into U S domestic politics even if America does not succeed in getting India to sign the NPT In any case India does not have the image of an enemy in the United States

What the United States might bear in mind as well is that the political bureaucratic class that rules India is perfectly able to deal skillfully with American pressure Since none of the positions that the United States holds say on intellectual property rights on nuclear proliferation on missile technology transfer and so on are either logically tenable or universally applicable Indians find it easy to drag the dialogues on indefinitely or till the Americans relent Mahatma Gandhi used the same tactics to put pressure on the British using their own political and judicial idioms to embarrass them

Building Mutual Trust

At the present juncture both the nations are following a policy of least provocation and slowly moving toward building mutual trust While the United States is not putting full pressure on India regarding the nuclear

40 Selig Harrison and Goffrey Kemp *India and America after the Cold War* (Washington D C 1993) pp 26–27 Emphasis added

41 *India Abroad* 23 April 1993 p 22.

42. Cohen A Fresh U S Policy for South Asia pp 1–2 Harrison and Kemp *India and America After the Cold War* pp 36–37

question the latter is also not over reacting to certain U S moves even though they are offensive For example the Indian reaction to the U S ban on all exports to the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) for two years since mid 1992 for its deal with Russia to import cryogenic engines (violating the provisions of the MTCR) was unusually low key Notwithstanding rhetorical outbursts in the Indian parliament the government simply branded the U S decision as an avoidable irritant in our bilateral relationship "[43]

The challenge is now to consolidate the trend From the Indian perspective the starting point should be a clear U S position with regard to the territorial integrity of India in keeping with the existing reality If the United States can use its good offices to convince both India and Pakistan to recognize the line of actual control in Kashmir as the permanent boundary and thereby end their forty five year confrontation it would not only go a long way toward building confidence between the two states but also ensure an enduring U S influence in the region that can be exploited for mutual advantage Stephen Cohen is right that the road to accession to the NPT runs through Kashmir [44] To make the NPT question a high priority issue without solving the Kashmir dispute amounts to putting the cart before the horse The Clinton administration must take care not to repeat the failure of Jimmy Carter in this regard.[45]

It has been the consistent policy of the United States not to disturb the states system that emerged after the Second World War [46] The disintegration of the former Soviet Union and some of the East European countries with its attendant problems for U S foreign policy has indeed vindicated the U S wisdom in this regard Should not the United States then see to it that the existing territorial reality in Kashmir is sanctified since any alteration in Kashmir s status is fraught with dangerous implications for regional stability and might cause added headaches for Washington for years to come Any change in the territorial situation to India s disadvantage would not only create further problems for India s integrity as a nation it would strengthen the forces of Hindu nationalism in India to the detriment of both regional stability and India s integration into the global economy neither of which is in America s interest.

The Chinese Connection

Given India s determined mood to work out a mutually advantageous strategic understanding with the United States (reflected in its role during the Gulf War joint naval exercises recognition of Israel and so forth) it is possible that it might relax its posture on the NPT [47] But before that occurs two things must happen First, there must be a solution of the Kashmir problem based on existing territorial reality The other one is a bit more ticklish It concerns China s nuclear capability The Indian strategic community has never failed to point out that Delhi s nuclear policy is intricately linked to what happens in China Whether Beijing is a real threat to India may be a moot point but the fact remains that there is a psychological compulsion for how the Indian elite see India vis á vis China How can India sign the NPT without weakening its position vis á vis China? One idea could be as Cohen argues to give a non nuclear India a permanent seat in the UN Security Council [48] India has been pleading for the reorganization of the Security Council for quite some time and this gives some scope for quid pro-quo

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43 *Times of India* 13 May 1992 So far the United States has not lifted the ban although it has agreed to allow some shipments in deference of contractual obligations agreed upon prior to the imposition of the ban *India Abroad* 30 October 1992 and 5 February 1993

44 Cohen A Fresh U S policy for South Asia p 2.

45 One scholar wrote The Carter administration ended its term with a South Asian policy in shambles It had abandoned its own emphasis on nuclear proliferation and human rights yet its failure to anticipate and counter act the Soviet invasion was a major strategic embarrassment. It wound up with the worst of all worlds Ganguly *U S Policy toward South Asia* p 237

46 On this point, see Patrick M Morgan The Ambiguities in the American Role paper presented to the Conference on Coping with Regional Conflict University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign October 9–11 1992

47 Partha S Ghosh Post Gulf War Foreign Policy Need for Rethinking *Mainstream* (New Delhi) 30 March 1991 pp 23–31 J Mohan Malik India s Response to the Gulf Crisis Implications for Indian Foreign Policy *Asian Survey* 31 (9) (September 1991) 847–61 See also Tariq Rauf Regional Approaches to Non Proliferation in South Asia, in Tariq Rauf ed *Regional Approaches to Curbing Nuclear Proliferation in the Middle East and South Asia* (Aurora Papers No 16 Canadian Centre for Global Security) pp 93–109

48 Stephen Philip Cohen A Way Out of the South Asia Arms Race *The Washington Post* 28 September 1992 See by the same author India s Regional Impact *Seminar* (New Delhi) 401 (January 1993) 69–74 Also see Manoj Joshi Threat Perceptions *Seminar* 383 (July 1991) 17–25

The containment of Chinese power could be in the long term interest of the United States as well and a sufficient amount of sympathy from Japan for the move could be expected in this regard China is exposed to political instability both on account of its asymmetrical political and economic developments as well as its inter regional disparities The combination of an unstable polity and a huge military suggests a potentiality dangerous mix At the moment it does not appear that the Clinton administration is seriously considering any drastic change in U S –China policy but that does not suggest a closed mind During his confirmation hearings in April 1993 Winston Lord the nominee for the post of Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs indicated that the government was in favor of continuing the earlier approach that is Shunning China is no alternative Both on account of U S economic interests as well as strategic reasons (for example North Korea s withdrawal from IAEA inspections has enhanced China s importance for it can wield its influence on North Korea to make it reconsider its decision) the United States according to Lord should conduct a nuanced policy toward Beijing until a more humane system emerges In policy terms the approach would be nuanced and balanced with the effort to use MFN [most favored nation] to encourage better performance better conduct in China in many areas—proliferation trade human rights for their own citizens and with respect to people in Tibet [49] China has an $18 billion trade surplus with the United States and as such the latter is in a position to wield considerable influence on China If that influence is used to improve the human rights situation there as well as contain its military power in collaboration with Japan it would go a long way to improve U S –India relations [50]

All this calls for a sustained U S concern for South Asia and patient diplomacy It is hoped that the new Bureau of South Asian Affairs in the Department of State would make concerted efforts to urge a cooperative consciousness in the region It is quite likely that any favorable attitude toward India would be greeted with suspicion in Pakistan [51] This fear in the Pakistani mind would have to be allayed The basic premises of U S policy in the region should therefore be that the United States has continuing interests in South Asia (democracy nonproliferation economic liberalization and so forth) and political interests in working with some of the South Asian states to pursue common strategic objectives (peacekeeping in and outside the region possibly containment of China) [52] Correspondingly India too has a huge stake in expanding its frontiers of cooperation with the United States to ensure its security and promote its economic interests together with working out strategies to accommodate U S concerns about nuclear proliferation violation of intellectual property rights and so on

Conclusion

Writing on current affairs is always a challenge particularly in these days of information explosion Futuristic projections about every aspect of human activity and the behavior of states are so much in abundance that they are hard to keep track of What is even more problematic is that in spite of an abundance of data correct assessments are not always possible Iraq s nuclear capability was not fully assessed until actual UN inspections took place According to one expert early wrong estimates were due not to data collection but rather data fusion caused by over computerization and jurisdictional concerns in the intelligence community [53]

Besides there is always the element of unpredictability in history changing the assumed course of events Even a month before the fall of the Berlin wall in September 1990 hardly any knowledgeable West German actually foresaw the event. Even the influential Deutsche Bank executive Alfred Herrhausen who was one of the most optimistic about German reunification believed it would take about a year or two for it to happen [54]

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49 *India Abroad* 9 April 1993 p 19

50 Cohen A Fresh U S Policy for South Asia pp 1–2. See also C Raja Mohan Nuclear Dialogue with Japan *The Hindu* (New Delhi) 4 February 1993

51 The Carnegie study referred to above has been viewed in Pakistan as anti Pakistan See *The Herald* February 1993 pp 30–31 35–36

52 Cohen A Fresh U S Policy for South Asia p 1

53 Peter D Zimmerman Proliferation of Missiles and Nuclear Weapons *CSIS Agenda 93* p 14

54 Daniel Burstein *Euroquake Europe s Explosive Economic Challenge will Change the World* (New York Simon and Schuster 1991) p 67 In September 1990 the author had conducted forty interviews with West German business and political leaders most of whom were extremely well informed about the situation in East Germany

The whole Gorbachev phenomenon was indeed an accident that altered the face of the world almost overnight Can one therefore be accurate about the future and if so what should be the time frame? Paul Krugman advises us to be modest for history teaches us to be humble In 1947 most [American] economists were pessimists expecting the return of mass unemployment The extraordinary growth of the next twenty five years surprised them all In the early 1970s by contrast, nearly everyone was excessively optimistic None of the major economic difficulties of the 1970s and 1980s—the energy crisis the productivity slowdown the rise of European unemployment, the debt crisis—was foreseen [55] Paul Kennedy s *Preparing for the Twenty First Century* reflects the same sobriety [56]

One s approach to future trends in U S –India relations should therefore be cautious Much would depend upon the success or failure of India s political and economic developments together with the course of politics in the United States Present indicators suggest a better climate Everything now depends upon how judiciously the opportunity is exploited. Then only the hope would turn into the reality

55 Paul Krugman, *The Age of Diminished Expectations U.S Economic Policy in the 1990s* (Cambridge Mass MIT Press 1992) p 169

56 Kennedy however writes that we ought to recognize that our endeavors might have only a marginal effect on the profound driving forces of today s world We also ought to be aware that interventions (like enhancing female education in developing countries) could produce their own unforeseen and unintended changes Nothing is certain except that we face innumerable uncertainties but simply recognizing that fact provides a vital starting point, and is of course far better than being blindly unaware of how our world is changing p 348

Dr Partha S Ghosh is a director at the Indian Council of Social Science Research in New Delhi India. Between September 1992 and May 1993 he was a Ford Visiting Scholar with the Program in Arms Control Disarmament, and International Security (ACDIS) University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign Dr Ghosh received his doctorate in international studies from Jawaharlal Nehru University New Delhi His publications include *Sino Soviet Relations U S Perceptions and Policy Responses 1949 1959* (Uppal Publishing House 1981) and *South Asian Regionalism Domestic Constraints* (Manohar in press) and numerous book chapters and journal articles This paper was written while Dr Ghosh was a Visiting Scholar at ACDIS